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Letter dated 6 November 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the recent Reykjavík Conference on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem, which was held in Reykjavík from 1 to 4 October 2001 (see annex). The Conference was jointly organized by the Government of Iceland and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with the co-sponsorship of the Government of Norway.

The Conference adopted the Reykjavík Declaration on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem. In the Declaration, the Government of Iceland is requested to convey the Declaration to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Director-General of FAO, the Chairman of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which is to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002, and to relevant fisheries management organizations for their consideration.

It is my Government's belief that the Declaration is an important contribution by fisheries nations to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and I kindly ask that you circulate it as a document of the General Assembly in the preparatory process of the World Summit. The text of the Declaration is enclosed in Arabic, Chinese, English, French and Spanish.

(*Signed*) Thorsteinn **Ingólfsson**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 6 November 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Reykjavik Declaration on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Spanish]

Having met at the Reykjavik Conference on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem from 1 to 4 October 2001,

Appreciating the initiative taken by the Government of Iceland and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to organize the Conference with the co-sponsorship of the Government of Norway,

Recalling that this initiative was endorsed at the Twenty-fourth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (26 February - 2 March 2001) and at the One Hundred and Twentieth Session of the FAO Council (June 2001),

Reaffirming that the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the Convention) sets out the rights and duties of States with respect to the use and conservation of the ocean and its resources, including the conservation and management of living marine resources,

Recalling that in recent years the world community has agreed on several additional legal and political commitments that supplement the provisions of the Convention, including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21 (Chapter 17),

Reaffirming the principles of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries,

Recalling further the four International Plans of Action formulated in accordance with the Code of Conduct, namely for the Management of Fishing Capacity, for the Conservation and Management of Sharks, for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries, and to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing,

Reaffirming that the FAO Council during its One Hundred and Twentieth Session recommended that ecosystem-based fisheries management studies to be conducted by FAO as agreed in paragraph 39 of the Report at the Twenty-fourth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries should be balanced and holistic in approach,

Welcoming and taking into account the discussion in the scientific symposium of the Conference,

Recognizing that sustainable fisheries management incorporating ecosystem considerations entails taking into account the impacts of fisheries on the marine ecosystem and the impacts of the marine ecosystem on fisheries,

Confirming that the objective of including ecosystem considerations in fisheries management is to contribute to long-term food security and to human development and to assure the effective conservation and sustainable use of the ecosystem and its resources,

Appreciating that the Conference represented an important opportunity for all fisheries stakeholders to jointly assess the means for including ecosystem considerations in fisheries management,

Aware that the sustainable use of living marine resources contributes substantially to human food security, as well as dietary variety, provides for the livelihood of millions of people and is a central pillar of many national economies, especially low-income food-deficit countries and small island developing States,

Recognizing the complex inter-relationship between fisheries and other components of the marine ecosystems,

Convinced that including ecosystem considerations in fisheries management provides a framework within which States and fisheries management organizations would enhance management performance,

Affirming that incorporation of ecosystem considerations implies more effective conservation of the ecosystem and sustainable use and an increased attention to interactions, such as predator-prey relationships, among different stocks and species of living marine resources; furthermore that it entails an understanding of the impact of human activities on the ecosystem, including the possible structural distortions they can cause in the ecosystem,

Recognizing the need to strengthen and sustain management capacity, including scientific, legal and institutional frameworks with the aim of incorporating among other things ecosystem considerations,

Emphazising that the scientific basis for including ecosystem considerations in fisheries management needs further development and that there is incomplete scientific knowledge about the structure, functioning, components and properties of the ecosystem as well as about the ecological impact of fishing,

Recognizing that certain non-fishery activities have an impact on the marine ecosystem and have consequences for management. These include land-based and sea-based activities which affect habitat, water quality, fisheries productivity, and food quality and safety,

Recognizing also that the majority of developing countries face major challenges in incorporating ecosystem considerations into fisheries management and that international cooperation and support are necessary,

Declare that, in an effort to reinforce responsible and sustainable fisheries in the marine ecosystem, we will individually and collectively work on incorporating ecosystem considerations into that management to that aim.

Towards this end, we further declare:

1. Our determination to continue effective implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct, which is our common and agreed guide in strengthening and building fisheries management systems, as well as the International Plans of Action as formulated in accordance with the Code, and the Kyoto Declaration and Plan of Action on the Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security.

2. There is a clear need to introduce immediately effective management plans with incentives that encourage responsible fisheries and sustainable use of marine ecosystems, including mechanisms for reducing excessive fishing efforts to sustainable levels.

3. It is important to strengthen, improve, and where appropriate establish, regional and international fisheries management organizations and incorporate in their work ecosystem considerations and improve cooperation between those bodies and regional bodies in charge of managing and conserving the marine environment.

4. Prevention of adverse effects of non-fisheries activities on the marine ecosystems and fisheries requires action by relevant authorities and other stakeholders.

5. While it is necessary to take immediate action to address particularly urgent problems on the basis of the precautionary approach, it is important to advance the scientific basis for incorporating ecosystem considerations, building on existing and future available scientific knowledge. Towards this end we will undertake to:

(a) advance the scientific basis for developing and implementing management strategies that incorporate ecosystem considerations and which will ensure sustainable yields while

conserving stocks and maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and habitats on which they depend;

(b) identify and describe the structure, components and functioning of relevant marine ecosystems, diet composition and food webs, species interactions and predator-prey relationships, the role of habitat and the biological, physical and oceanographic factors affecting ecosystem stability and resilience;

(c) build or enhance systematic monitoring of natural variability and its relations to ecosystem productivity;

(d) improve the monitoring of by-catch and discards in all fisheries to obtain better knowledge of the amount of fish actually taken;

(e) support research and technology developments of fishing gear and practices to improve gear selectivity and reduce adverse impacts of fishing practices on habitat and biological diversity;

(f) assess adverse human impacts of non-fisheries activities on the marine environment as well as the consequences of these impacts for sustainable use.

6. The interaction between aquaculture development in the marine environment and capture fisheries should be monitored through relevant institutional and regulatory arrangements.

7. Our determination to strengthen international cooperation with the aim of supporting developing countries in incorporating ecosystem considerations into fisheries management, in particular in building their expertise through education and training for collecting and processing the biological, oceanographic, ecological and fisheries data needed for designing, implementing and upgrading management strategies.

8. We resolve to improve the enabling environment by encouraging technology transfer contributing to sustainable management where appropriate, introducing sound regulatory frameworks, examining and where necessary removing trade distortions, and promoting transparency.

9. We urge relevant technical and financial international organizations and FAO to cooperate in providing States with access to technical advice and information about effective management regimes and about the experience from such arrangements, and other support, devoting special attention to developing countries.

10. We would encourage FAO to work with scientific and technical experts from all different regions to develop technical guidelines for best practices with regard to introducing ecosystem considerations into fisheries management. These technical guidelines should be presented at the next session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries.

AND REQUEST that the Government of Iceland convey this Declaration to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Chairman of the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg in September 2002 and relevant fisheries management organizations for their consideration.